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ABSTRACT

How do black females attempt to resolve the dilemma of femininity and high achievement goals? This paper discusses and reviews the nature of that relationship between femininity and high achievement need which has generally been of a reverse nature. The dilemma of being female for the black women is that she is being urged by society in general to cultivate traits that lend themselves to femininity, i.e., dependency, passiveness, submissiveness, and the like. On the other hand, she is pressured by the political-economic system and survival needs of the black community to develop those traits that are contrary to the ideas of womanhood as prescribed by the sex role standard, i.e., independence, self-assertion, persistence, and so on. Historical and future implications are also discussed. (Author/RJ)

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DILEMMA OF GROWING UP BLACK AND FEMALE*

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss how Black Females attempt to resolve the dilemma of femininity and high achievement goals. Generally there has been a reverse relationship between femininity and high need achievement. The objective of this report is to review the nature of the relationship for Black females. Since the young Black female is presented with different models of life style for womanliness it is suspected that her femininity may develop differently from that documented for her White counterparts. Black females become cognizant of the fact early in life that she will not be able to achieve the cultural imposed goals of being soft, white, clinging and feminine to obtain a man to support her and provide an array of material possessions. How will she attempt to incorporate femininity as defined by the prevailing culture into her culture's definition of the female role?

Characteristics of female

A sex role standard has been defined as a belief shared by the members of the culture regarding the characteristics that are appropriate for males and females (Kagan, 1971). As a result of an inner desire to identify with the same-sex model, and to gain societal approval and avoid rejection, the female in American society has emerged with discernible characteristics. Some of these characteristics may be described by phrases sometimes used by mothers to their girls, ("ladies are seen, not heard"),

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by fathers ("you are a good cook and will grow up and make someone a good wife"), by society ("my God women drivers; crying, just like a woman; lady, please make up your mind; dumb females"). Society has frequently and consistently emphasized the importance of physical attractiveness in it's sex role expectations for females. Generally, the physical make-up of the individual is the area that can be altered the least by the environment. Yet in thi area there is a hope for change and attempts to accentuate the positive that has been translated by Madison Avenue into a million dollar market. Females strive to improve their physical appearance, to make themselves attractive, and radiate sex appeal. The results of studies of attitudes of Americans and representation from the mass media indicate that the ideal American girl has an attractive face, a hairless body, a small frame, and moderate-sized breasts (Kagan, 1971). She is white, pretty, small, and usually blond and blue-eyed. The efforts of females to duplicate or closely res ble this ideal has lined the pockets of exercise and reducing salons, cosmetic manufacturers, fat doctors, etc. One entrepreneur has named his yacht after one of his hottest money-making cosmetic items.

The sex role standard has also defined certain behavior as being more characteristic of females, i.e., dependency, passivity, conformity, nurturance, submissiveness, etc. A series of studies of overt behavior and/or story telling responses indicate more occurrance of affiliative and nurturant behavior and concern with interpersonal relationships among girls than boys (Kagan, 1971). Generally, girls are less active physically, displaying less overt physical aggression, are more sensitive to physical pain, have significantly less genital sexuality, display greater verbal, perceptual and cognitive skills, and are better at analyzing and anticipating environmental demands than boys (Bardwick & Douvan, 1971).

Girl babies sleep more, cry less and have more moderate activity

levels than boys (Moss, 1967). These early sex differences in aggression lend credence to the belief of a biological basis for the sex differential in aggression. Fighting, quarreling, destructiveness, and temper tantrums are more frequent among boys than girls (Donelson, 1973). Girls perform less initiative aggression than boys after being exposed to aggressive models (Bandura, 1965). They usually show more prosocial aggression, however, when anonymity is guaranteed girls are as capable as boys of delivering aggressive consequences such as electric shock in laboratory experiments (McCandless & Evans, 1973).

An expressive role, skills in dealing with people, has also been prescribed for women (Reiss, 1966) and she usually fulfills it by her desire to be warm, interested in preventing social and family disruptions, sweet, passive, etc. Females seem to be better and earlier trained for a commitment to and capacity for romantic love and the subtleties of emotion that lead to strong heterosexual attachments (McCancless & Evans, 1973). She is expected to excell in the ability to elicit sexual arousal in a male, desire to be a wife and mother, freely give nurturance to her children, passive and affectionate to a love object, and be emotional in her reactions. Therefore, it is not surprising that most studies report greater dependency, conformity, and social passivity for females than males at all ages (Kagan, 1971).

Effects of Sex Role Standards

The striving toward the sex role standard has had a most notable effect on the mastery of specific cognitive skills. Problems involving spatial and mechanical reasoning, physics, science, logic, and mathematics are viewed as more appropriate for boys than for girls. Whenever adolescent or adult subjects are tested on these skills males consistently obtain higher scores than females (Kagan, 1971). Female's general poor performance

in these areas may be a result of poor motivation to excell because of fear of appearing unfeminine and/or low ego involvement in task. In problem-solving situations boys are more likely than girls to display qualities of autonomy, persistence; and an analytic approach which facilitates intellectual mastery (Kagan, 1971).

In the early years girls excell over boys in mastery of academic tasks. The primary school atmosphere is perceived as feminine, the teacher is usually a female, and emphasis is placed on behaviors that are more appropriate for girls (i.e., inhibition of aggression, singing, etc.). As a result, boys are likely to resist efforts to fully participate in the situation and may fall behind academically. From kindergarten through grade four, the girl typically outperforms the boy in all areas and the ratio of boys to girls with reading proglems ranges from 3 to 1 to 6 to 1 (Bentzen, 1963). There seems to be a developmental shift and in the adolescent years, academic and vocational success is viewed as masculine and inappropriate for females. Adolescent females begin to experience anxiety over feeling more competent than boys, avoid intellectual competitiveness and aspire to vocations that are viewed as sexually appropriate. The adolescent girl, her parents, her girl friends, and her boy friends perceive success as measured by objective, visible achievement as anththetical to femininity (Bardwick & Douvan, 1971). It is in the area of need achievement that the Black female differs from the general society's expectations of what is appropriately feminine.

Black Female's Aspirations and Accomplishments

In spite of the difficulties presented by sex typing the Black female has generally emerged with a positive self-concept and high aspirations and expectations. In several of the studies reviewed there are suggestions that the Black female has more positive self-attitudes than does

the Black male. However, a negative self-image appeared to be more characteristic of the Black child than of the white child (Dreger & Miller, 1973). Dreger and Miller in a review of studies have found that "Black girls have higher educational hopes than do Black boys...Black high school seniors in Kentucky set occupational goals similar to those of whites with the exception that the Black female has higher expectations. The Black girls concentrated their occupational expectations among the professions and usually rejected the traditional role of housewife. Out of a total of 52 Black female subjects not one wanted to be a housewife, as contrasted with 24 percent of the white girls... an ambitious pattern of aspiration and expectation among Black girls was reported with a much greater percentage of Black girls than boys actually enrolled in college preparatory programs (p. 151)." In studies designed to measure generalized achievement motivation using the McClelland method it has been found that Black female's achievement motivation is greater than the Black male (Smith & Abramson, 1962).

In a study conducted by Brazziel (1971), 262 Negro students completed the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule. Sample was divided geographically into lower-south (rural and urban students) and upper-south (residents of large metropolitan area). When sex comparisons are made for the lower-south group, females exhibit significantly higher needs for achievement, endurance and intraception, but are lower in deference, autonomy and heterosexuality. On the other hand, there are only two significant differences between the sexes in the upper-south sample, the females score lower on needs for dominance and heterosexuality. What is noticeable is the relative absence of sex differences in this group when compared to the norm group. Sex differences are present in twelve of fifteen variables in the general college norm but are revealed in only two instances in the

upper-south and six instances in the lower-south.

Sex diffierences by social class were not pronounced, in the lower-south, both classes revealed higher female needs for achievement. Middle income females in the lower-south group revealed higher needs for nurturance and middle-income males in the upper-south group scored higher on dominance.

The high need for achievement and higher educational aims among Black females has historically resulted in more Black girls enrolled in college than boys, however recently this trend has reversed. Although Black men in college now exceed Black women, more Black women over 25 are college graduates than are men in this age group (U. S. Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstract 1970, Table 157, p. 109.). The sex difference in educational achievement varies according to the geographical region. When national statistics are considered Black women have completed a median of 8.7 school years and men 7.7. In the north there was no difference between the sexes in 1950 and by 1965 men were ahead of the women. In the south women still are more highly educated (Billingsley, 1968).

Epstein (1972) notes that seemingly contradictory figures are reported concerning the total number of graduate and professional degrees earned by Black men and women. "A study of Negro colleges where the majority of blacks have earned their graduate degrees (Blake, 1971, p. 746) shows that Black women earned 60% of the graduate and professional degrees awarded in 1964-65. However, a Ford Foundation study (1970) of all Black Ph.D. holders in 1967-68 indicated that of a 50% sample of the total, only 21% were women. Another source covering Black colleges in 1964 lists more women than men earning MA.'s but more men than women earning Ph.D.'s (p. 916)."

In most professional groups, Black women constitute a larger proportion of women than Black men do among males in the groups (Epstein, 1973). From 1880 to 1960 there has been a larger percentage of Black females

classified as in professional service than Black males, except in 1880 when the number of male teachers (66.4%) was greater than female (33.6%) (United States Census, 1880-1960). In the United States as a whole, Black women out-number men in the highest job categores, where 10.8 per cent of them compared to 8.2 per cent of male workers. When we consider the North and West, men slightly outstrip women, but in the South, where schoolteaching has been traditionally open to Black women, the 11.9 per cent of women in professional, technical, and managerial jobs considerably outstrips the 6.4 per cent of Black men and occupational opportunities are greater for Black workers in the North than in the South, and in the South, particularly, they are better for Black women than for Black men (Billingsley, 1968).

It must be remembered that a very small percentage of the Black women employed are professional workers, over half are classified as in domestic and personal services (U. S. Census, 1880-1960). It is only when the statistics refer to nonwhite employed is there a decrease in numbers of females employed as private household workers. In 1969, 12 per cent of nonwhite females employed were in professional, technical, and managerial fields as compared to 11 per cent nonwhite males (The Social and Economic Status of Negroes in the United States, 1969).

In 1960 the median income for Black females with four years or more of college was $6,747 and $8,567 for Black males (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1970). At all educational levels Black female's income is approximately $1,000 to $2,000 less than the Black male of equivalent education. (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1970). This difference in income is most notable when we compare median income of Black female head of family ($3,341) with Black male head of family ($7,329) (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1970). These findings suggest that although there are slightly more Black female than Black male professionals, the females are mainly employed in the low-paying and low status professional jobs, i.e., teaching, nursing, etc.

Black families have been accused of traditionally encouraging their girls to high achievement at the expense of the boys. This practice of stressing achievement for girls has been defended by Grier and Cobb (1968). The Black family was concerned about the physical safety and protection they could offer their children. For their sons, they were taught to avoid open conflict with white people and they had to curb their aggression and other behaviors that are thought of as masculine in American society. For their daughters, the aim was to protect them from the sexual exploitation they might suffer if forced to work as domestics. The families sought to give them economic freedom through education. Schools were seen as a refuge for the daughter from what was considered a "traditional way of life." Grier (1968) notes "If school is seen as a refuge from the white aggressor, and if the Black family places its women and children within such safe confines, and if the men turn to face the enemy--pray show me that critic of the 'weak' Negro family (p. 124)." In addition the Black family's major occupation after emancipation was farming and share-cropping and male off-spring were necessary to provide a basic economic support for the family. Therefore, the family's educational aspirations were generally centered around the females. The financial resources of the family was limited and in order for a member of the family to attend school, the others had to labor to provide the money. This usually meant that the males of the family pooled their resources and sent the females to school.

The attitude of the current Black family has changed very little. Girls are still encouraged to stay in school in the south and urban ghettos as a place of refuge from the problems of modern day society. These personal and familial aspirations for achievement of Black females have materialized somewhat as expected.

In discussing the role of the Black female the issue of Black

matriarchy has been listed as a source of conflict and the implication being that the Black female has been destructive to the Black community. Robert Staple (1970) dismissed this cruel thesis by noting "For the Black female, her objective reality is a society where she is economically exploited because she is both female and Black; she must face the inevitable situation of a shortage of Black males because they have been taken out of circulation by American's neo-colonialist wars, railroaded into prisons, or killed off early by the effects of ghetto living conditions. To label her a matriarch is a classical example of what Malcolm X called making the victim the criminal (p. 8)."

Black and White Females Differences

The conflict over sex role identity and high need in social achievement distinguishes the Black and white females. Generally females in American society have exhibited lower occupational and educational aspirations. Females have been socialized to succeed in the traditional sex roles and do not maximize the personality traits that are essential for success in the real world, i.e., independence, aggression, competitiveness, leadership, etc. Society does not stress these personality characteristics for females and therefore very few have succeeded in the business and professional world where these skills are essential. There is a difference, however, for Black females.

Horner has attempted to explain the phenomenon of low motive to achieve for females in general. Horner (1968) hypothesized the existence of a motive to avoid success ($M\text{-}_s$) which she defined as the expectancy or anticipation of negative consequences as a result of success in competitive achievement situations. Weston and Mednick (1973) investigated the relationship between Horner's postulated motive and race and social class. Subjects were undergraduate women and the verbal TAT cues such as those used by Horner and a

brief questionnaire requesting socio-economic information were administered. It was found that Black college women exhibited fewer M_{-s} responses than white college women. There was no social class differences for the Black female on the number of M_{-s} responses. White lower class females were not included in the study and no class comparisons were made for whites.

In the area of professional success Black career women have outperformed their white counterparts. Black women constitute a larger proportion of the Black professional community than white women in the white professional community. Only 7 per cent of white physicians are women, but 9.6 per cent of Black doctors are women; Black women make up 8 per cent of Black lawyers but white women constitute only 3 per cent of all white lawyers; Black women accountants, musicians, professional nurses, and social workers exceeded their white female colleagues in earnings (Epstein, 1973). Black women are more likely to be employed than the white female with equivalent education.

One of the most obvious differences between Black and white females is the economic necessity of Black females working in order for the family to maintain a middle-class standard of living. Because of the racist political economic practice in the general society Black men do not have access to higher paying occupations nor do they have any real control over the economic base. The source of high need achievement may not be solely due to personal aspiration but also economic need. The Black female's role in the economic survival of the Black community may be compared to that of other women in pre-industrialized and less technologically advanced societies and/or to industrial societies during their pre-industrialized stage of development. Women were generally called upon to work in those societies, i.e., pioneer women, Russia, China, etc. Historically Black women have had the role of worker with very few accrued benefits.

Black Female's Sex-role Identity

There are two possible explanations of why a larger percentage of Black female than white strive toward goals and seemingly comfortably function in roles that are viewed by the general society as anti-feminine. One approach is to view her strivings as a result of her feelings of rejection by society. Another view is to see her aims of accomplishment as a result of being exposed to successful, competent, female models in the Black community.

The first approach may result because the Black female will encounter problems establishing her sex role that are different from her white counterpart largely because of society's view of what is desireable in womanhood. As Grier (1968) noted "the first measure of a child's worth is made by her mother, and if, as is the case with so many Black people in America, that mother feels that she, herself, is a creature of little worth, this daughter, however valued and desired, represents her scorned self (p. 32)." The Black woman is the anitheses of America's idea of a beautiful ideal woman as communicated throughout all strata of society. The ideal all-American is a blond, blue-eyed, white-skinned girl with regular features. This prevailing ideal of womanhood presents problems for Black girls as can be easily seen in this typical self-revealing comment..."Because I was dark I was always being plastered with vaseline so I wouldn't look ashy. Whenever I had my picture taken they would pile a whitish powder on my face and make the lights so bright I always came out looking ghostly. My mother stopped speaking to any number of people because they said I would have been pretty if I hadn't been so dark. Like nearly every little Black girl, I had my share of dreams of waking up to find myself with long blond curls, blue eyes and skin like milk." (Marshall, p. 26).

The patterns of marriage in the Black community also reinforce the rejection of the Black female. The light-skinned female who looked white

was viewed as the most desireable marriage partner for Black men (Staples, 1973). Interestingly, the reverse skin-color was viewed as most sought after by Black females. The dark skin Black male was preferred more than the light skin who was viewed as self-centered and closely resembling the oppressive white male.

There was no way for the Black female to be transformed into a lovely white maiden so she did the next best thing. She ascribed to those characteristics that are viewed by society as valuable that she could obtain. Most personality characteristics that are valued by society are possessed by successful persons, usually males, i.e., independence, need for success, self-assertion, ambition, drive, etc. These qualities are earned and acquired and not controlled by the genes like, color of skin, texture of hair, physique, etc. If she could not gain acceptance in the traditional female manner she would have to be acknowledged for her possession of the other traits on which society places a premium. As a result of society's rejection of her Black womanliness she strove for acceptance through avenues that would demand recongition, acquiring some of the traditionally male personality traits.

It was possible for her to obtain measures of success because of her unique position in society. Socio-economic pressures and governmental regulations of a racist society permitted her to function in this manner with little negative reactions.

Another possible reason for the Black female's striving toward success is the type of models she is exposed to in the Black community. Modeling is most effected when there is a close similarity between the modeler and the modelee (Bandura, 1965). The Black models in her community are of women obtaining success in business and professional careers, mothers who are heads of households coping with the many problems of being poor in urban America, and just a daily contact with women who are leading useful productive lives

inspite of the pervasive effects of racism in society. Although this is not the appropriate mechanism or time to review her long and rich history it is worth noting that in West African societies women by custom and tradition play a substantial role in the community. Her role as a mother was considered of primary importance in patrilineal or matrilineal society. Her treatment during slavery and reconstruction has been greatly documented and visibly evident in her present day descendents.

The important point is that females in the Black community are highly visible and noted for their strengths, accomplishments in face of obstacles, and personal sacrifices for her family and the Black community. The young female, therefore, is exposed to successful females and has models to aspire to emulate. Black female's view of what is appropriately female comes from her own community and not from feelings of rejection from the white world.

Ladner (1972) dismisses the idea that Black females depreciate themselves because they have a clear understanding of the root causes of their rejection and place the blame squarely where it belongs. She (Ladner, 1972) categorizes the self-hatred thesis as "many other myths that are propagated about Black people. It falls within the realm of institutional subjugation that is designed to perpetuate an oppressive class (p. 107)." The urban lower-class adolescent girls that were the basis for her study had been exposed to women who played a central role in their households and community. Ladner (1972) notes that "it is against this backdrop that the symbol of the resourceful woman becomes an influential model in their lives (p. 132)."

Implications

The delimma of being a female for the Black woman is that she is being urged by society in general to cultivate the traits that lend themselves to femininity, i.e., dependency, passiveness, submissiveness, etc. On the other hand, she is pressured by the political-economic system and survival needs

of the Black community to develop those traits that are contrary to the ideas of womanhood as prescribed by the sex role standard, i.e., independence, self-assertion, persistence, etc.

Future research should be designed to provide insights into the psychological processes involved in the establishment of the Black female's sex role identity. It is obvious from her history of oppression and role in the Black community that there is similarity and dissimilarity with the white female. Is the major motivating factor feelings of rejection from the white sex role standard and/or identification with the model of her community?

Regardless of the specifics of the psychological process it is important that appropriate models should be provided by the adult citizens. Exposure to and availability of successful Black females should be abundant in the young females life.

The educational system should be aware when they are counseling young Black females that her aspirations and needs are different from the typical females. Her historical role in the community and it's impact on her developing personality have to be taken into consideration.

It is also important that the economic-political system acknowledge that in order for the Black community to survive Black males and females need higher paying jobs. When approximately one-fourth of the families have females as head of household, supportive systems have to be provided in the community, i.e., comprehensive child care service, nutritional programs, improved delivery of health care, etc.

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